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THE SPATIAL QUALE.

AN ANSWER BY J. E. CABOT.

In the interesting and instructive article, of this title, contributed by Dr. James to the January number of the JOURNAL, he takes occasion to object to my description of Space, in the shape in which this notion first dawns upon consciousness, as not sufficiently accurate. It is not, he says, the indefinite *otherness* of the objects of perception, but a quite distinct sort of *otherness*, due to a special form of sensibility which certain objects awaken in us. As to this, I do not see that we disagree; indeed, I think he ought to go still further than he does, and make his distinction deeper — a distinction of categories, and not merely of kinds within the same category. For I hold the feeling of Space to be the first appearance of Quantity, and thus the first intimation of external reference among feelings previously qualitative.

Without sharing Berkeley's view, that the external world is only states of our own consciousness, we may suppose that to some of the lower animals, or even to man in the earlier stages of his development, it would so appear, if they could have a clear view of their own mental situation. To an oyster, we may suppose the universe consists of various affections of the oyster, more or less distinctly classified by their different characters or qualities, as they are felt or remembered. To such a consciousness, the only grounds of relation among its facts would be these characters. Things would be known as pleasant, gratifying, etc., or the reverse, and the only *place* of their existence would be consciousness itself. I do not mean that there would be no *feeling* of position; a polyp, *e. g.*, shows that he has this feeling by searching about for a morsel of food that has escaped him — I only mean that there is probably no reflexion upon the feeling; there is apprehension of external things, but no apprehension of externality.

But, however this may be, for I am not concerned here to

prove that there is a merely qualitative consciousness, I only concede that there may be; admitting that there is, there must come at a certain stage of development the intimation of relations wholly untranslatable into terms of Quality, other distinctions cutting right across the former ones, and in virtue of which a feeling may be at the same time different from itself, and different feelings may coincide, and this without any disturbance of their quality; a consciousness of muchness or many-ness in, say, the single color "blue," or the feeling "warmth," or again, the feeling that the "blue" is also "warm."

The human mind, as we see, relieves itself from this embarrassment by the hypothesis of external objects, which are able, as it were, to hold apart identical feelings, and to identify different ones; so that we find no difficulty *e. g.* in the fact that the fire gives us warmth and light from all its parts at once. But a more accurate psychology, reflecting that these feelings are not in the fire, but in us; and further, that the being in us, the sensibility in which they are manifested, is not the mere form, but the very substance of knowledge, the fact known as distinguished from the inferences we may draw from it — such a psychology, I say, finds it necessary to suppose that this further determination, this muchness or collaterality of the feeling, if it is real, is also a quality, an ultimate characteristic, which is *given* in it, as the character "blue" or "warm" is given in the sensible impression.

When the attempt is made, however, to point out the *Quale* of position, or extent, it seems so difficult even to make it clear to ourselves that there can be such a *Quale* — that is, a fixed character of being other than itself, of having dimensions which are not dimensions of blueness, warmth, etc., but only express that there is *more* of the same — that it is not surprising to find many psychologists preferring to suppose that the apparently simple fact of collaterality, or simultaneous otherness in a sensation, is really a complex fact, the indiscriminate impression of several feelings, some answering to the sameness and others to the difference, brought together as one — as *e. g.* in the consciousness of motion, in which

several sensations overlap each other, and so are at once identified and discriminated, or again, in the coexistence of different retinal impressions, etc.

This theory, however, either assumes spatial position to begin with — points from which motion starts, or in which retinal impressions are localized, etc., and then there is no explanation but only a statement of the fact to be explained — or else it merely states a contradiction without solving it; for if these different determinations of the same feeling really meet, they must abolish each other; blue cannot be anything but blue, or warmth than warmth, without ceasing to exist. If they do not meet, but merely coexist, as a sound, a scent, and a taste may co-exist, or several sounds be heard at once — this has nothing to do with extent.

Yet the fact remains that this breadth, this collateral subdivision belongs to all our sensations alike, as something perfectly distinct from their protractedness, number, or intensity — in short, from any contrast inside of the particular quality. In the view of a uniformly whitened wall, or the feel of a smooth marble slab, there is no contrast of feelings, yet there is extent, and equally in the smallest of their parts, in the *minimum visible* or *tangible* as truly as in the widest horizon. Various circumstances — variety of color, consciousness of movement, etc. — may call our attention to this breadth or enable us to measure it, but it is there before.

There is nothing for it, then, Dr. James considers, but to accept this primordial bigness as an ultimate quality of sensations, and of every sensation. The excitement of any extended part of the body, he says, is felt as extended — why, we cannot say. A punctiform organ could not give us the feeling of Space.

By a punctiform organ he means, I suppose, one whereby we should receive sensations having position, but no extent; a sensation say of blue, which is not spread out upon a surface, a feeling of warmth not pervading any body. But then, I ask, what would be wanting to such a sensation — what would have to be added in order that it should give us the impression of extent? Only, it seems to me, that the relation to other points,

which is implied in its position, should be made explicit and visible, or tangible. It cannot really *have* position except by relation to other things, and all that is needed is that this fact should be felt. And such is our actual case. Things are not seen as blue, or felt as warm, except *somewhere* with regard to other impressions, or without their parts being somewhere with regard to the others. They are all somewhere in particular, not merely somewhere in general.

Now, what is this but saying that the qualities of our sensations, are not ultimate or absolute, but relative; that we have no experience of things existing by themselves; that such existence is a mental abstraction, not a reality?

If Dr. James means only that extent may be seen or felt, I quite agree, and even that it may be heard, tasted, and smelt. There is a difference, however, in the readiness with which we ascribe extent to the affection of various organs, and this difference is instructive. Thus, we feel some hesitation, as Dr. James remarks, in speaking of spacious tastes, or voluminous sounds, or pains. Yet there are voluminous sounds, like the rolling of thunder; and extensive pains, like the pain of lumbago; and others that are fine or attenuated, like the prick of a pin, or the squeak of a slate-pencil. This proves, he considers, that they all must have some extent or spatial bulk.

Dr. James does not mean that a pain could be halved and quartered, and its separate parts set up at the right or the left of each other. That is to say, he does not mean that it is a thing having extent or bulk; what he means, I take it, is that in every sensation, over and above the particular quality of blue, warm, etc., a sign is given us, which we are apt to overlook because the import is of more practical moment to us than the sign, but which indicates objective determinations of things. Thus it is that the same extent of excited retina can suggest the most various directions or sizes of the object, according to the circumstances — *i. e.*, according to the interpretation. This is equally true of all our sensations; but, in the case of the impressions of sight and touch, we are so constantly engaged in interpreting the signs they give us that we pass at once to the thing signified, and take for granted that

the nervous affection is the quality of an object — the shock communicated to the retina, a flash of light ; the pea between the crossed fingers, two peas, etc. — whereas, in the case of a taste, a sound, or a pain, there is more distinct survival of the subjective affection.

But if this, or anything like it, is Dr. James's position, as I gather from page 84 of his article that it is, then I do not see why he should expect to find in the sign, as one of its native qualities, before it becomes a sign, the objective determinations of the thing signified, any more than he would expect to find in the wood of a finger-post the native tendency to set people on the right road. The thing does not exist until it is so used. And so of extent, it does not exist until those relations of which it consists are in some degree determined by the mind. I do not say that it is a conscious construction, in which separate positions are first distinguished and then brought into relations with each other. On the contrary, I hold the perception that the positions cannot exist without the relations, or the relations without the positions, to be the perception of Space ; and that this confused, self-contradictory feeling, when it is accounted for and its contradictions solved by means of an adequate hypothesis, becomes the notion of Space.

Of course, it is possible to imagine ourselves resting content with the feeling, and this seems to be a favorite procedure with the physiological psychologists. We may, if we please, consider the extent of a scarlet nasturtium as a fact of the same order with its color. That is to say, we may, and often do, stop at the fact that each is an impression, a something felt — and this being sufficient for our purpose, we may neglect to inquire farther into what is implied in this fact. Only, I say, this is not philosophizing. It is not the office of philosophy to lead us to feel our thoughts (however useful this may sometimes be, from another point of view), but to teach us to understand our feelings — to find out what they signify, what notions they imply, or what conclusions they oblige us to adopt. In this direction — that is, in the attempt to discover what our feeling of extension means, or what Space

really is—I do not see that the facts cited by Dr. James, showing that we feel extent or motion without knowing what they are, help us much. He says he is not conscious of any mental act of creation or production whereby the notion of Space is put together out of non-spatial feelings. Neither, I suppose, is he cognizant of the exact height of the stairs he daily traverses. But his foot is ; and were the quarter of an inch added to one of them, his foot would not fail to apprise him of it. Now, such a fact as this he could verify with a carpenter's rule, but there are other facts of which our feelings apprise us which cannot be verified by a carpenter's rule, and as to these the question may arise, whether they are real or whether they are only feelings.

Such a fact is this of extent or spatial existence. The carpenter's rule can tell us how much ; but, in the first place, is there any *much* in the case, or how can there be ; at any rate, how can we know for certain that there is, when our feelings apprise us only of their own existence? How can they tell us that something *else* is? If we are satisfied with the fact that they do tell us, we may neglect the farther inquiry. But it is the whole business of philosophy. As Dr. James says, the important question is, Do the native forms of sensibility yield us *a priori* propositions, synthetic judgments? If they do not, one does not see what call there is to continue this laborious trifling.